

Movies & Entertainment FAQs

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I have a production idea involving the military. Is there someone who can help me get Army assistance?

The Department of the Army's Office of the Chief of Public Affairs, Los Angeles Branch (OCPA-LA), is the entertainment industry's direct liaison to the United States Army. Its primary purpose is to assist film, television, music video, and video and CD-ROM game professionals in all matters relating to the United States Army. The Los Angeles Branch is staffed by experienced personnel with many years of military service who are thoroughly familiar with the industry production requirements.

What can the Los Angeles Branch do for me?

The personnel at the LA Branch will:

- Act as a local, authoritative source of information about the US Army, providing authentication, verification and limited research for producers, directors, writers, property masters, wardrobe supervisors, film editors, etc.
- Provide assistance and advice to scriptwriters during initial writing phases; review rough drafts or treatments and suggest changes prior to script finalization.
- Arrange for and coordinate the use of Army equipment and supplies not commercially available.
- Coordinate requests for US Army stock footage.
- Arrange for and coordinate with Army installations or properties for location filming.
- Coordinate requests for personal appearances of US Army personnel.

Where is the Los Angeles Branch located?

We can be reached at:

U.S. Army Office of the Chief of Public Affairs,
Los Angeles Branch
10880 Wilshire Boulevard Suite 1250
Los Angeles, California 90024-4127

Phone (310) 235-7621
Fax (310) 235-6075
E-mail: kathy.canhamross@us.army.mil

What is the procedure to obtain assistance?

You will need to send a letter on production company letterhead to this office stating your proposal to produce a specific entertainment project. This letter should include your production company's credits or pedigree and a synopsis of the story identifying any potential benefits to the Departments of the Army and Defense for assisting in the project. Additionally, the letter should identify your first blush Army equipment, personnel and location requirements. Lastly, identify the general time frame in which you wish to proceed (expect a six to ten week delay from the date you initiate correspondence before Department of Defense approval is received).

You must also submit a copy of your script. Once the script is reviewed and determined appropriate for forwarding to Washington, additional copies will be required. After your project is forwarded for approval, it will be reviewed by other Department of the Army agencies to determine historical accuracy, feasibility, etc. Copies of the script will be sent to the Department of Defense with comments and recommendations for Army assistance.

The Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs) will review the material submitted, and will have the final word on whether or not the Department of Defense will provide assistance to a project.

If Department of Defense assistance is granted, a project officer will be appointed to work with your production. You will also be required to sign a production agreement.

You may be required to provide a cash advance to cover reimbursement of government expenses incurred by military units supporting your project. The Army's project officer will determine this amount, based on your equipment and personnel requirements. Your check will be deposited into an escrow account established by the project.

Remember you need to allow extra time for approvals if your story involves other military services or government agencies.

Who decides if the Army will cooperate with my production?

The Los Angeles Branch will coordinate your request with the Army staff. Then we will forward the request to the Army's Office of the Chief of Public Affairs, which will provide a recommendation to the Department of Defense. Final approval of all requests for military assistance (regardless of the branch of service), rests at the Department of Defense's Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs), Special Assistant for Audio-Visual.

Remember, although Department of Defense is the final approval authority, the Special Assistant for Audiovisual will not act on your request without a recommendation from the Department of the Army. Therefore, calling the Los Angeles Branch is the first action you should take to get approval.

What criteria are used to determine if my production will be approved?

The following criteria are used to judge the possibility of fully supporting entertainment industry requests. The production must benefit the Department of Defense or otherwise be in the national interest based on the following factors:

- The production must help increase public understanding of the Armed Forces and the Department of Defense.
- The production should help Armed Forces recruiting and retention programs.
- The production must be authentic in its portrayal of persons, places, actual military operations or historical events. Fictional portrayals must depict a feasible interpretation of military life, operations and policies.

- The production should not appear to condone or endorse activities by private citizens or organizations that are contrary to US Government policy.
- The producer must agree to sign and abide by the production agreement and DODI5410.16 (you will receive copies of both documents early in your coordination).
- Assets requested must be available when required.

When can I expect a commitment for assistance?

Department of Defense commitments will be made only after:

- Both the script and the requirements list have been approved;
- The producer has indicated a distribution arrangement or has demonstrated capability to complete the production; and
- Upon completion of the written Production Agreement, that formalizes the relationship between the production company and the Army.

Will Department of Defense want to review my completed project?

When the Department of Defense has provided equipment, location, and/or personnel support to a project, the completed production must be submitted for official Department of Defense screening in Washington, D.C., prior to public release and preferably before the print is locked.

How will screen credits be handled?

Upon receipt of your notification of completion of principal photography, the project officer will suggest appropriate names and wording to be used in the credits. The credit title will be confirmed for final use only after the film has been officially reviewed and approved.

Will I need to provide a copy of the project, still photographs and promotional material to the Army?

Yes, when Department of Defense has assisted on a production, you will be obliged to furnish, on request, prints or duplication material. A minimum of five copies of the video release of the project will also have to be supplied to the Army. This material will only be used for historical purposes or for internal information. This material will not be used by Department of Defense to compete with commercial exhibition.

Who is and what does the project officer do? Can I get a technical advisor assigned to my project?

Usually the project officer can act as the technical advisor. On matters that require a special skill, however, a technical advisor may be called in, if requested by the production company and when considered to be in the best interest of the Department of Defense.

The project officer will make the arrangements for the technical advisor's arrival, but, like the project officer, all expenses, to include travel, housing, and per diem, will be met by the production company.

Is it possible to use active military personnel as extras in my film?

Active duty personnel may appear in your film, but they must do so on a voluntary basis, while in a non-duty status, and at no cost to the government. They can be hired individually as extras and in accordance with the current and local industry standards. The Los Angeles Branch can help notify soldiers that the production company needs extras but it cannot arrange for them to be hired.

Soldiers who are hired as extras must meet the standard Department of Defense height and weight, grooming, appearance and military courtesy standards; those failing to do so may be told to leave the set by the project officer.

Soldiers performing their standard duty may be used as background if it does not interfere with their duties. Soldiers doing their physical fitness training, driving vehicles, marksmanship training, or marching are examples of this.

Can the Army help with advertising or promoting my film?

You will need to submit a storyboard or script for any promotion or commercial requiring Army assistance through the Los Angeles Branch to the Department of the Army. There can be no implied endorsement by the Army of your product in your ad. Only requests from productions receiving full support from the Departments of the Army and Defense will be considered.

Can I film at Army locations?

Filming at active Army or Department of Defense installations is governed by Department of Defense Instruction 5410.16, DoD Assistance to Non-Government, Entertainment-Oriented Motion Pictures, Television and Video Productions. Productions filming at Army locations must not impair the operational readiness of the Army, must conform to established Army safety standards, and must leave the property in same or better conditions as when they were made available.

A request for access to Base Realignment and Closure property for film production purposes should be submitted by the production company to the Local Redevelopment Authority (LRA) for the installation. If necessary, the Base Closure and Community Reinvestment Office (BCCR) can provide information regarding the LRA to the production company and can assist a production company with finding an installation that suits its needs. Contact the BCCR at (703) 604-2400. If no LRA has been established for the installation, such requests should be submitted to the installation commander, site manager, or caretaker officer, as appropriate, for the installation.

May I film on Army property if my project does not depict the Army?

If your project does not depict the Army, the only posts you might be able to film on are those that are on the Base Realignment and Closure List, or the BRAC list.

Leases to film at BRAC sites will be handled through the Association of Film Commissioners, International (AFCI) member in whose jurisdiction that post is located. The procedures to film on a BRAC post are located in Appendix III of Making Movies. {link to guide.pdf}

Does my script have to be reviewed by the Army?

You must submit a copy of your script if you want Army support, including filming at active Army installations or using Army equipment or personnel. Exceptions to the requirement for script review are made productions being filmed at installations that have closed. Requests for a site specific review should be forwarded to BCCR, who'll coordinate the request with the OASD (PA). For productions to be filmed at closed U.S. Army installations on the list found in the Making Movies guide{link to guide.pdf}, the U.S. Army is authorized to allow access to the installations without any form of prior approval from either DoD or the Chief of the U.S. Army Office of the Chief of Public Affairs.

Will the Army review my project to point out errors without my seeking official assistance?

The Army can provide courtesy assistance to your project. The main difference between full and courtesy assistance is that we cannot provide access to facilities, equipment or personnel for filming unless a project is approved for full support. With courtesy assistance, we will review your script and point out errors that you may or may not want to correct. We can also advise you on the correct types of equipment to use and the markings for them. If you would like, and we have the time, we may be able to visit the set to provide some assistance.

Does a TV series, music video or video game require the same approval process?

Proposals for television series must include objectives and format of the series and story treatment, or other evidence of overall series content. Each episode must still qualify individually under provisions of the basic policy. A specific plan to expedite review of scripts and film will be arranged.

Proposals for music videos are treated just like movies, except we decided whether to support the project based on the song as submitted, the storyboard of the video and the support requested.

Proposals for video games, whether CD-ROM, electronic games system or internet, require a storyboard of the game, samples of other work and the support requested.

What are my financial responsibilities to the government?

The production company will be billed only for those expenses that are considered to be additional expenses to the government. In no way can the taxpayer finance entertainment projects. The following are generally considered to be reimbursable costs:

- Petroleum, oil and lubricants for equipment used.
- Resultant depot maintenance.
- Expendable supplies.
- Travel and per diem.
- Civilian overtime.
- Replenishment spares.
- Lost or damaged equipment.
- Commercial power or other utilities for facilities kept open beyond normal duty hours, or in such cases where the production company's consumption of utilities is significant.
- Costs incurred in diverting or moving equipment to a specific location to support production requirements.
- All flying hours associated with production company requirements, except when missions coincide with and can be considered legitimate operational and training missions.
- Military manpower costs for National Guard or Reserve personnel assigned to production support (such as drivers and pilots).
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Additionally, the production company is responsible for insuring that all Army equipment and facilities used are restored to their original, or better, condition.

All charges will be compiled by the military installation furnishing Army assets and monitored by the assigned project officer, who will provide them to the Production Company. Payment will be made from the production company's cash advance that has been placed into an escrow account by the project officer. If more money is needed, the production company will be notified by the project officer and the money will be transferred to the escrow account. Any money left in the account after all bills have been paid will be forwarded back to the production company by the project officer.

If the command providing support agrees, the escrow account can be waived and payment can be made after the support is given. The project officer has 45 days after principal photography is completed in which to consolidate the bills and forward them to the production company.

The production company will pay for all transportation and billeting needs of the project officer. To ensure rapid communications with decision-makers are possible, the project officer should travel with and be billeted with the film's producer. Per diem for Army personnel is non-taxable. The production company will also make the same arrangements for any technical adviser requested by either Department of Defense or the production company, and the Department of Defense Special Assistant for Audiovisual.

Beyond operational expenses, the production company will not be charged for asset usage (i.e. rental and/or depreciation factors).

I only need stock footage. Is it available?

Department of Defense motion picture and video footage is available for purchase when a production qualifies for assistance. Remember, any costs incurred in connection with the selection, processing and shipment of stock footage will be your responsibility.

My project is still in development. Do I need to go through the approval process for research access to stock footage?

Conceptual support access may be granted by the Los Angeles Branch upon receipt of a letter stating that you are conducting research for a project and that you will not copy or use footage in your possession for any purpose other than research unless approved by Los Angeles Branch. Remember, this is not project approval. You will still have to go through the approval process once your script is complete.

What is the process for buying stock footage?

If you are looking for footage which will be included in a feature film, you must:
Send a letter, to the Los Angeles Branch, requesting access to the Defense Visual Information Center (DVIC). The request should state the reason the footage is needed and the subject matter of footage desired.

Once approved, you will need to contact the DVIC, to research, select and purchase the required footage. It is located at March Air Force Reserve Base in Riverside, California.

The DVIC is a Defense Contract Agency; therefore, public requesters are charged \$100.00 minimum, which is nonrefundable. This charge includes two hours of research with the researcher. A charge of \$43.00 per hour will be assessed for research beyond the first two hours. Duplication charges apply as well. The DVIC staff can explain the fee schedule to you.
The DVIC has transferred most of its material prior to Vietnam to the National Archives in Washington D. C.; you will have to contact them directly.

May I re-use footage shot or purchased for this production on subsequent projects?

Motion picture footage shot with Department of Defense assistance and official Department of Defense footage released for a specific production are not to be used for other productions without approval.

It is your responsibility to ensure that stock footage obtained from the DVIC is used only in conjunction with the production specified, unless specific approval for additional usage has been obtained from the Departments of the Army and Defense.

Edited motion picture footage from completed productions and from animation will not be released except by special authorization from the Department of Defense. Requestors will be required to furnish letters of indemnification on certain categories of material when the original source cannot be determined.

What is a Production Agreement?

The main points of a production agreement are:

- The Department of Defense (DoD) will appoint a project officer to the production who will coordinate military support for the production company and will verify that depictions conform to the approved script.
- The production company agrees to consult with the project officer if there are changes to the agreed-upon script.
- The operational capacity and readiness of the military may not be impaired by the support provided.
- There will be no deviation from DoD safety standards.
- The production company will not damage or impair the appearance of DoD property and will restore property used for the production to the same condition, or better, in which it was made available.
- The production company agrees to indemnify and hold harmless the Department of Defense, its agencies, and personnel for any injury or damage to its personnel or equipment or agencies that occur on or with DoD property, unless it is determined to be caused by the negligence of DoD personnel and/or property.
- The production company agrees not to reuse or sell any footage shot or provided through the cooperation of the Department of Defense without the DoD's approval.
- The production company agrees to provide an advanced screening of the production to the Department of Defense in Washington D. C.
- The production company agrees to provide appropriate military credits at the end of the film.
- The production company agrees to provide videotapes, posters, photos and media material to the Department of Defense for historical purposes.